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PRIVATE PICTURE-GALLERIES OF THE UNITED STATES.

By E. DURAND-GREVILLE.

*SECOND ARTICLE.**

IN the course of our tour we were constantly and pleasantly impressed by evidence of the superiority of modern French art. Mrs. Blodgett's collection produced a charming impression aside from its paintings, for not only are her two parlors consecrated to paintings by French artists, but everything in them is French: the bronzes and candelabra are Clodion's, the hangings are from designs by Boucher; on every side we were met by reminders of our absent country. The English school, with very beautiful works by J. Reynolds, Gainsborough, and Constable, reigns supreme in her large and handsome dining-room; the two state apartments are filled with French works of the last three centuries, bearing the names of Prud'hon (three works), Drouais, Boucher, Lancret, Corot, and Rousseau. We have reserved the crowning works for final mention,—a superb "Italian Harbor" at sunset by Claude Lorrain, and a not less wonderful pastel, a portrait of the notary Lesdiguières, by Latour. Three studies by Delacroix, for his Aristotle, Cicero, and Hercules, burned with the Hôtel-de-Ville, Paris, add the finishing-touch to this collection of French art. How many sad events were recalled by these studies!

Mrs. Stewart's gallery, recently sold, was admirably disposed in a house, or,

more properly speaking, in a palace of white stone severe and imposing in appearance. It contained works from many countries, which, from an artistic point of view, were of unequal value. Among the most noticeable were a painting by Stevens; two by Troyon; the celebrated "Horse Fair" by Rosa Bonheur; "Cattle in the Autumn Forests," the largest and one of the finest of Auguste Bonheur's; a good Jacques; "The End of May" by Daubigny, a rich and fertile painting; three Gérômes, one of which, "Collaboration," is really remarkable; and, finally, four Meissoniers: a water-color portrait; two mounted hussars, each leading a horse by the bridle and talking with a sentry in broad sunlight; "Charity," a man on horseback giving alms to a mendicant; and, last of all, "1807." This painting made a great stir in Paris, where it was criticised on account of a certain lack of unity in the general effect, but the details were considered to be wonderfully worked out: there is a horse's head in the foreground which is a fine anatomical study, and the eye has the transparency of life. The emperor's head is fine, and would alone suffice to establish the reputation of an artist. Much time, patience, and talent were expended on this somewhat confused but truly remarkable work.

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We have reserved the treasures of the Vanderbilt family for final mention. The well-known ceiling "*Phébé*" by Paul Baudry is in Cornelius Vanderbilt's house. "*The Marriage Feast of Psyche*," a ceiling by the same artist, better known than the first, is in the house of Wm. H. Vanderbilt. This gallery, more celebrated than all the rest, is the one which, by the number of its paintings, its very eclectic—perhaps too eclectic—selection, and its assemblage of numerous noted works serves to give the best possible idea of the taste of recently-enriched Americans.

Mr. Wm. H. Vanderbilt inherited from his father a large fortune, amassed in less than forty years, which was so colossal, that the sums bequeathed to various institutions were scarcely missed.

His gallery, composed of two rooms lighted from above, is severe in arrangement and finished in dark wood, which heightens the effect of the paintings. The second room opens upon a large embrasure, containing a sunny conservatory, deliciously refreshing and filled with flowers in mid-winter. This little peep of nature, far from detracting from the effect of his art-works, serves to establish a mysterious bond between the ideal vision of the painter and the realities of the living world; it frees the mind of the visitor from a sense of imprisonment in the midst of masterpieces, and offers a larger range for admiration.

This gallery was collected, we were informed, in the course of a few years. We are ignorant of the number of millions which it must have cost, but it was doubtless a large sum, as, according to a well-known law, speed is

often gained at the expense of money. The catalogue before us is dated 1884, and the composition of the gallery was precisely the same in the spring of 1886, the date when we were permitted to leisurely examine each one of its one hundred and sixty-nine paintings and twenty-seven water-colors. The ten additional paintings in other parts of the house were not sufficiently important, judging by the names of the artists, to induce us to ask to see them. Nearly two-thirds—more accurately, one hundred and fifteen—of the two hundred and eight works of art in the gallery of Mr. Wm. H. Vanderbilt, in April, 1886, were French; the remainder were Belgian, Dutch, English, German, Austrian, Italian, Spanish, etc. We will mention only the really superior works in this gallery, all of which happen to be French. Ultra-patriotism has absolutely no part in this choice, which is imperative. Among the works of French artists all are not of equal merit: thus, five or six works by Diaz are second-rate, and some absolutely mediocre; the Delacroix is not very remarkable; the Troyons, which are better ("*On the Road*," No. 101, for example), do not elicit special admiration. Among the three Gérômes there are two, "*The Sword Dance*" and the "*Great Condé*," interesting only for their rich and ingenious composition, and the third, the "*Bashi-Bazouk*" drinking from a wooden bowl, in which his face is almost entirely concealed, is one of the best-drawn figures, and most correct as to pose, disposition of light and shade, and the most richly painted work of an artist who is sometimes a little cold. We will mention also Van Marcke's

"White Cow," a fine "Arab" by Bonnat, a "Breton Woman" by J. Breton, several canvases of unequal merit by Rosa Bonheur, a charming sketch of "Volunteer Enlistments" by Couture, and thus reach the works of three or four masters, which are the gems of this collection.

Several of the seven Meissonniers owned by Mr. Vanderbilt rank among the finest of the works of this artist, who will always be greater than many authors of immense canvases. Every one is familiar with "The Arrival," a rich work, dated 1883, and "L'Ordonnance," 1866, an excellent picture of an interior. In his picture of "General Desaix Interrogating a Peasant" Meissonnier has reached the very zenith of his power, since the multiplied details harmonize with the unity of the whole: nine figures in the foreground, infantry and cavalry stationed in a forest, trunks of trees, branches, and twigs without end, seem to have been instantaneously photographed by an apparatus with a governing mind. The occupants of the foreground, particularly in the middle and at the right, seem to be in motion, and are modelled like little ivory figures of the most exquisite design. The four heads in the foreground are executed in a simple, free, and flexible manner which has never been surpassed by the artist. Flemish masters of the good old time might consider Meissonnier as one of their descendants. These two pictures were in the Exposition of 1867. We will also mention two diminutive paintings, "Artist at Work" (30 by 25 centimetres, dated 1855), and "The Reader" (1856, 23 by 18 centimetres), which is assuredly one of this artist's masterpieces. In this work the details of form, color, and

proportion accord perfectly with the general harmony; and an excellent aerial perspective softly envelops the figure and surroundings without detracting from their distinctness or accuracy.

Daubigny is represented in this gallery by quite a large landscape, "Morning," in which several cows have just waded into a river, while the rising sun fills an amber-hued sky with little pink and gray clouds.

Corot is there with two landscapes, which, while not his finest work, are strong witnesses to his skill. The "Study from Nature," especially, is remarkable for truth and boldness. Corot never uses two strokes of the brush where one will suffice. All appears without too great effort. The feathery grass in the foreground trembles, the soft, white sun inundates the sloping sward, the road is sandy, the trees are waving and of a subdued green. It is the faithful portrait of nature in the suburbs of Paris, unobtrusive and refined.

There are seven landscapes by Rousseau, including "Skirt of a Forest," a truthful study; "Morning" (from the Laurent-Richards sale), a delicate bit of art, very white and luminous, with a soft, rich sky; and "Banks of the Oise," an exquisite work. The most beautiful Rousseau in the collection, however, is a veritable masterpiece, entitled "Passes of Apremont." This was painted in 1859, or at least it was in the Salon of that year, and afterward appeared in the Exposition of 1867; since that time we had lost sight of it, and it was a rare pleasure to meet it once more. Entering the second room of this gallery for the first time, we saw this picture a short

distance off, in a corner; it was apparently composed of but two tones, and its natural and serene effect seemed to destroy and dissipate the neighboring canvases,—a Knaus, for example, which was rendered shallow, meaningless, and weak by force of contrast. At a distance one distinguishes a deep sky of whitish hue over a large, sombre mass, whose outlines are formed by the rounding crests of rocky eminences and grand oaks; in the foreground one discerns in the reddish grass a pool with abrupt edges, whose waters reflect the overhanging masses and a corner of sky. A closer inspection discloses the extremely rich character of the work; one can analyze the shape of the oaks, the carpet of herbs and reddish heather, broken here and there by a gray stone lying on the ground or a bit of deep-green furze. This harmony in gray, green, and red is distinguished by deep unity, and the longer the eye dwells on the vast landscape the more intensely is one impressed by its truthfulness to nature. Rousseau is not always so simple in the presence of nature, he has at times done violence to it, but in this work he has shown himself sincere and great. Corot and Millet alone, among landscape artists of his day, have been more true, more sincere, and more simple in their manner of viewing nature. The proof of this is that one can turn suddenly from the "Passes of Apremont" to Millet's "Sower" near by without experiencing the least shock; the same impression of unity remains, only in a more intensified degree. Millet thus gains by the comparison.

There are two "Sowers" by Millet; the first, badly cracked from having

been retouched several times by Millet, is the property of Mr. Sh——, of Boston. That in the Vanderbilt gallery, executed without doubt at one time, has profited by the artist's previous efforts. This is in a perfect state of preservation, barring a surface speck or two, which affect only the varnish, and which would disappear if the picture were lightly cleaned from time to time with a piece of kid glove. Which of the two "Sowers" was in the Salon of 1850? Their height is about the same, but the one in Boston is three centimetres wider than the other. Unfortunately, the Salon pamphlets of that date did not give dimensions, an omission which renders identification difficult. It is probable that it was the Boston painting which was executed first and is now in the poorer state of preservation.

The remaining Millets in this gallery are extremely beautiful, but all are not as fine as this. We will mention the "Knitting Lesson,"—a favorite theme with Millet,—a quiet, calm scene, in which the color accords with the sentiment; also a little canvas bathed in sunshine, entitled "At the Well," representing a peasant girl pouring water into leather receptacles. The water is drawn from Millet's own well. He put his whole heart into painting this well, each stone of which was dear to him, and which he has represented so often that it is impossible to mistake it. Finally, above all the rest, and by the side of the "Sower," there is a work which deserves high praise, although it has attracted but little attention on account of the unpoetic nature of its subject. A peasant sowing seed has this in his favor, that, in a manner, he performs one of the sacred rites of

Mother Earth; the moment that he appears in a twilight landscape, shadowed against a sky gilded with the last rays of the setting sun, he partakes of the peculiar poetry of his surroundings, while, on the other hand, a farmer carrying a bucket in either hand does not awaken the inspiration of a poet either in prose or in verse. Notwithstanding this, Millet has never shown himself more of an artist in the true sense of the word than in treating this prosaic subject; he never displayed more vigor or more flexibility in drawing a head or moulding a bust under a garment which covers without concealing the form. A great artist only could have modelled the right shoulder so superbly, in fact, the whole arm, which is so correctly proportioned and is a fine study of the muscles of the wrist drawn by the weight of the pail; a grand artist only could have reproduced the bucket itself; we refer not so much to the shape as to the materials of which it is composed: the moist wood and iron, rusty in places and shining in others, are portrayed in a manner superior even to Bonvin. Only a grand master of light could have expressed the relation between objects in light and shadow in this stream of sunshine falling from right to left and the subdued tone of the ivy-covered stone well, forming a sombre background to the picture. In all this there is nothing of the light, dazzling tints affected by so many water-colorists, but a sober and profound light, the light that distinguishes masterpieces.

In concluding this review of private galleries in the East, we are obliged to avow its incompleteness,

since it omits any mention of the rest of America. Before leaving New York, we saw a superb illustrated work, entitled "Art Treasures," by Mr. Strahan, an artist of some reputation, and a former pupil of Gérôme. We thus learned that a journey in the West would have enabled us to see a number of interesting works; for example, a Millet and a Delacroix at the house of Mr. Probasco, of Cincinnati. Fine works of art, however, seem to have a preference for the Atlantic coast, as if they were loath to separate themselves too widely from their birthplace. We are told that remote Western towns are rich in Corots at five hundred francs each, and in Rousseaus at three hundred. This remark does not apply to some exceptional galleries in Chicago, St. Louis, and San Francisco.

To speak frankly, a number of spurious works have remained in the East: one or two Millets, several Corots,—even in well-chosen galleries,—and Diazes without end! A large number of landscapes and a quarter of the figures attributed to this artist are evidently false, or so doubtful that it amounts to the same thing. On several occasions we timidly ventured to suggest that a certain work seemed scarcely to be in the usual style of Diaz, and the owner invariably responded, "I assure you, sir, it is one of his finest!" Once only in the course of our American journey did we encounter a gentleman, the proprietor of a large and beautiful gallery, who asked us to frankly state our opinion concerning the authenticity of his treasures. We left some without names. This was not, however, in the United States, but in Can-

ada. There was not a Diaz in the collection. It is to be hoped that we gained a friend.

The number of beautiful works of art in the United States is now sufficiently large to enable American artists to study without leaving their country. This movement in artistic taste will not retrograde; on the con-

trary, the contemplation of masterpieces of French art, united to the lessons that young American artists seek in the bosom of our school, will result in creating a national school in America,—we say national advisedly, for the lessons of a truly good master never in any respect hamper the originality of the pupil.



THE SMOKER.

Drawn by C. A. La Due, after Meissonier's Painting.